



June 24, 2021

STATEMENT TO THE MEDIA AND PUBLIC REGARDING THE DISCOVERY OF 751 UNMARKED  
GRAVES ON THE GROUNDS OF THE FORMER MARIEVAL RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL IN  
SASKATCHEWAN

Our hearts are heavy with sorrow today. More weight has been added to the collective grief felt by Indigenous people - as well as every human being who lives in this country - which has been built on the systemic genocide of innocents.

The finding of 751 unmarked graves on the grounds of the Marieval residential school in Saskatchewan is not a new discovery to Cowessess First Nation, to Indigenous people, or to our Survivors. As was the case with the 215 Kamloops children, there had been a knowing in the community from historical accounts by knowledge keepers, and relatives who attended the institution. It is believed that many of these graves had their headstones removed in the 1960s by the Catholic Church representatives who oversaw the school cemetery. It is not clear if all the unmarked graves belong to children - as there are stories within the First Nation about adults being buried there as well.

Canada can no longer turn a blind eye to these crimes, because the world is now watching. In their sleep, our relatives have woken a nation to the truth of its own self - where in the not-so-distant past, it systemically carried out the extermination of First Nations people.

It is not enough for apologies and sympathies, and the time has long passed for condolences and regrets. Our relatives deserve justice. Chippewas of the Thames First Nation stands with Cowessess First Nation in solidarity. We demand that the Canadian government and the Catholic Church respond to the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action 71 to 76](#) - and hand over all documents and records from these institutions, which have been withheld from us and greatly hinder our ability to identify and repatriate the remains of our loved ones.



Furthermore, we demand the Pope to issue an apology for the Roman Catholic Church's role in this genocide, as is outlined in the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action 58 to 61](#). We would like to remind the public that in 2018, Pope Francis was asked by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to deliver an apology to residential school survivors - and he refused.

We have stood here before, and we will stand here again. There will be more searches of the grounds of residential schools across the country, and more graves will be found. We will not stop until we find all of our children and bring them home.

To move forward as a nation, the truth needs to be acknowledged by all parties and learned from, so healing can happen.

We must walk this path of reconciliation together.

“  
They tried to bury us;  
they didn't know we were seeds.”